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Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks

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Volume 8, No. 2 Summer 1998

The Newsletter of Region One

Thompson Chain of Lakes Land Exchange

An opportunity to protect loons at Montana's largest fishing access site

The Thompson Chain of Lakes (TCL) land exchange, finalized in late June, has been called a tremendous win for northwest Montana residents. Wildlife managers are hoping it will also turn out to be a big plus for loons.

In the transaction, which is based on equivalent values, FWP will exchange 1,590 acres of uplands for 570 acres of Plum Creek Timber lakeshore lands. In addition, FWP will pay Plum Creek \$111,650 to balance the appraisal values. Funds would come from the Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund.

Art Vail, Plum Creek's Flathead Unit Manager, says the company will manage the lands they've acquired in accordance with environmental principles. "This means protecting public values and harvesting timber responsibly," he said.

Marty Watkins, the new FWP Parks Manager for Region One, notes that the exchange consolidates public ownership and ensures access to a number of lakes in the TCL Fishing Access Site.

Wildlife mitigation funding was involved because of the important



THE COMMON LOON is a species of special concern in Montana. FWP will implement a plan to help loons in the Thompson Chain of Lakes area. (Armer photo.)

wildlife concerns. "One of the major wildlife species of concern is the common loon," says Wildlife Biologist Gael Bissell. "The exchange protects the last two remaining loon nests in the TCL, and could offer opportunities to increase the number of loons in the area."

FWP Wildlife Manager Harvey Nyberg says management of loons should be proactive. "This land exchange and the proposed boating use restrictions for some parts of the area will protect loons into the future."

Bissell has compiled information and prepared a preliminary proposal to protect and enhance loons at the TCL. See some of the components outlined on Page 2.

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THE TCL LAND EXCHANGE secured lakeshore public access to some of the 21 lakes in the chain. The TCL area is the largest fishing access site in Montana.



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Management of the Common Loon for Thompson Chain of Lakes (TCL)

Biology/Life History

- Loons are the most primitive family of North American birds.
- There are about 56 nesting pairs in Montana; 85% of these nest in Region One.
- Loon reproduction rates are very low. Breeding typically begins at 6 years of age. Only about 25 young are produced each year in Montana. They spend the next 3 years on the west coast before returning to within 15 miles of where they were born. Survival during those first 3 years is so low that only about 8 of those 25 young make it back.
- Because of their strong ties to traditional nesting lakes, common loons are poor pioneers of new habitat.
- The loss of nesting birds jeopardizes the supply of young birds returning to the area as breeders; recovery of a population after it is gone is slow at best.
- In sum, once loons disappear, it is difficult to get them back. If they become listed as a federally threatened or endangered species, dramatic restrictions might be needed to ensure recovery.



Thompson Chain of Lakes History

- In the 1980s common loons successfully nested on at least five TCL lakes: McGregor, Lower Thompson, Upper Thompson, Horseshoe, and Loon. Historically, loons probably nested on Crystal and Middle Thompson Lakes.
- Currently, there are only two successful nesting pairs: one on each of the lower lobes of Upper Thompson Lake. Due to shallow water and no improved boat ramps before 1997, the only boats that could be launched there were small boats (e.g. canoes, rafts, rowboats) or low-powered boats. Traditional uses were fishing, floating, and swimming. Water skiers, fast boats, and personal watercraft were less common or non-existent.

Management Issues

- The common loon is listed as a “Species of Special Concern” by FWP; a “Sensitive Species” by USFS; and “with restricted range, vulnerable to extinction, rare and local” by the Montana Heritage Program.
- Montana’s loon management plan proposes site specific management as needed to ensure maintenance of existing populations. FWP does not want to see this species decline to the point of becoming endangered.
- Montana’s nesting population is well below historic levels but high enough to be able to sustain itself; the population appears stable in large part due to the success of signs placed around nest sites.

- The Upper Thompson loon nests are the last in the TCL; there is a possibility they will pioneer back to other lakes in the TCL if protection of young and suitable habitat are maintained.
- The characteristics of northwest Montana’s lakes are rapidly changing with increased use by recreationists and new shoreline developments, particularly on some parcels in TCL.
- Since completion of the TCL management plan, as many as 80 new lots may be added to the Rainbow/Upper Thompson Lake area. This would mean a 40% increase in number of home sites.
- In fall 1997, FWP placed a new boat ramp on the middle lobe of Upper Thompson Lake; the TCL management plan and EA identified increased boat use could impact nesting loons.
- FWP is using Wildlife Mitigation Funds as part of TCL land exchange to help secure habitat for common loons in TCL, particularly on section 32 along Upper Thompson Lakes. Use of these funds require an increased management emphasis on key wildlife areas.

FWP's Concerns at TCL

- Boat use and speeds on Upper Thompson Lake could dramatically increase due to new boat ramp and subdivision.
- The lobes of Upper Thompson are small with limited area for brood-rearing; nesting success of the only remaining pairs could easily be jeopardized with increases in boat use and speeds. Loss of nesting loons from the TCL chain would mean a significant loss to the state’s population.
- Loons should continue to successfully nest on the lower two lobes of Upper Thompson lake as long as:
 1. Voluntary nest sign program continues;
 2. Boat uses/speeds do not significantly increase;
 3. Land uses remain the same.

Proposal for TCL

- To mitigate for the new subdivision, increasing popularity, and location of the new boat ramp on the middle lobe of Upper Thompson, FWP proposes:
- A no-wake limitation on the two lower lobes of Upper Thompson Lake. The upper lobe of Upper Thompson would not have any wake or motorized restriction.
- Monitoring of loon nesting activity on Loon Lake; propose no-wake zone around nesting and/or brood rearing territories if deemed necessary to encourage nesting or to maintain nesting/rearing area.
- Continue to monitor loon and bald eagle use of TCL and implement education programs at campgrounds, local businesses, communities.

Family Fishing Day at McGilvray Lake Draws Hundreds of Anglers

About 500 kids and adults attended the June 6 family fishing day at McGilvray Lake near the Grizzly Boy Scout Base Camp north of Bigfork. This annual event, held in observance of National Fishing Week, has become the best attended fishing day in northwest Montana.

The fishing day is sponsored by the American Legion Post 86 of Bigfork and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Creston National Fish Hatchery), with help from the U.S. Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Doz-

ens of volunteers donate time and funding to make the fishing event possible.

The Creston National Fish Hatchery stocked the lake with several thousand rainbow trout prior to the event. Anglers caught many trout and panfish; a number of young anglers caught their first fish.

Participants took part in various learning activities. Montana FWP had aquatic insect and habitat displays, a fly tying station, and "Hooked on Fishing" materials. The Forest Service set up a fire tent camp, handled parking,

and organized a casting contest. The Bigfork American Legion Post and the Boy Scouts operated a concession stand for hungry anglers. Flathead County Search and Rescue had equipment displays and was on hand to provide first aid services. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided free photos of anglers with fish, organized registration materials, and operated a fish cleaning station.

Even the weather cooperated. A thunderstorm held off until the event was completed. 

PROUD YOUNG ANGLERS with their catches of trout and perch at the Family Fishing Day held at McGilvray Lake.



Black Bear Harvest Up in Region One

The numbers are in: the spring harvest of 330 black bears is about 30 percent higher than average for northwest Montana. Residents of Montana harvested 169 black bears (51%) while nonresidents bagged 161 black bears (49%). Nonresident hunters came from 29 states and one foreign country (Germany). Utah hunters harvested 64 of the bears, followed by Pennsylvania hunters with 19 bears.

BLACK BEAR

straight face profile no hump



shorter, darker claws

Anglers Reel 'Em in at

The weather was great and the fishing, well, the fishing was mythical.

About 40 anglers with disabilities caught 115 lake trout on the fifth annual "Fishing Without Barriers Day" on Flathead Lake, held on June 18. The anglers, who ranged from 8-78 years of age, were hosted by Montana Charterboat captains and several private boat operators. The lake trout ranged in size from 1-1/2 to 13 pounds and averaged about 4 pounds.

Rachel Osborne, a young woman from Missoula, had never caught fish like this and almost seemed stunned by it. When teenager Matt Sather of Kalispell was asked how many fish he'd caught, he said he lost count. Folks from the Immanuel Lutheran Home said the experience would last them a year. And in fact, the Fishing Without Barriers Day is the only chance many of the participants get to fish during the year because of their mobility impairments.

The annual event is made possible by generous donations of boats, time, fishing tackle, and of course, expertise by the Montana Charterboat Association and others. Jim Landwehr of the association says that it's a chance for them to give back to the community. Landwehr and the other charter captains obviously enjoy sharing their love of Flathead Lake fishing with the anglers.

"These smiles last a lifetime," says Landwehr. "And we're lucky to have this kind of fishery for these folks to enjoy." Landwehr contends that other areas would be hard-pressed to repeat the success of the three hours of fishing on Flathead

Lake. "I don't think there's another body of water in the country where you could take this group of folks out and catch 115 wild trout averaging 4 or 5 pounds in a few hours," he said.

The anglers and participants were treated to a special fish fry and



DREAM TRIP.
Captain Shorty Goggins was delighted to host a number of anglers on his new boat 'Shorty's Dream' in the photo above.



MATT SATHER (above) lost track of the number of fish he caught. Dusty Bagley helps him celebrate



MISSOULA ANGLERS Paul Stanley and Rachel Osborne (left photo) hold their fish while charterboat Captain Jim Landwehr watches the lines.

'Fishing Without Barriers' Day

barbecue after fishing. The lake trout fillets, rolled in cornmeal and deep-fat-fried, were the most popular attraction, followed by Jerry Howard's home-baked chocolate chip cookies.

A NICE LAKE TROUT. Guide Gary Fend and angler Miles Connelley (from Rexford) are both proud of Miles' catch.



Thanks are in order for everyone who participated, including:

Charterboat Captains: Jim Landwehr, Gary Fend, Glacier Fishing Charters; Shorty Goggins, Cal Mischke, Pepper Eidsvig, A-Able Fishing Charters; Jerry Landskrum,

Woods Bay Charters; Rusty Cornett and Russ Cornett, Jr., A-1 Charters; Dusty Bagley, Bagley Guide Service.

Private Boat Operators: Dave Minister, Guy Larendau, George Hover, Tim Shelton, Jim Vashro.

Jim Tebay: Owner and operator of Woods Bay Marina.

Tim Brubaker: Donated a fish mounting service to one of the anglers through a drawing.

FWP's Crossing the Barriers Committee: Jerry Howard (arranged for the food and beverages, baked cookies), Pat Thomas, Harry Grove, Sue McDonald (cooked the hot dogs), Bob and Wanda Worley (fried the fish), and Tim Brubaker.

Businesses: Fun Beverage, Coca Cola, Pepsi Cola, Super 1 Foods, Buttrey's, Tidyman's, Fred Meyer B & B, Eddies Bread, Costco.

Thanks to everyone!

Fishing Fair a Hit in Whitefish

A number of conservation groups teamed up with the Whitefish Mall, Sportsman and Ski Haus, and FWP to host a fishing fair at the mall pond this spring. The fair featured exhibits on fishing tackle, fishing techniques, fly tying, where to fish, aquatic insects and fish identification.

The event drew hundreds of youngsters and parents who took part in the educational activities as well as the fishing. The pond was stocked by the state's Arlee hatchery and by other fish purchased by the Sportsman Ski Haus.

Conservation Groups participating included: Flathead Wildlife, Inc; Montana BASS Federation; Western Montana Bassmasters; and Flathead Valley Trout Unlimited. Fisheries Manager Jim Vashro of FWP organized the event and coordinated its activities.

All parties agreed that the fair was a success and should become an annual event.



8-YEAR OLD VOLUNTEER Kevin Fraley (left) shares his knowledge of aquatic insects at the popular aquatic life station.

GREAT CATCH! Dalton Ackley (age 4), and brothers Conner (age 5) and Taylor (age 7) of Whitefish show off the rainbow trout they caught at the Whitefish Mall Fishing Fair.

Taylor caught one of the tagged fish and won a rod/reel outfit. All three brothers are members of FWP's Montana Angling Youth Club (MAY Club).



WAYNE WORTHINGTON of Flathead Wildlife Inc. helps a youngster at the lure making station.



6 'Hooked on Fishing' Continues Growth in Northwest Montana

The national "Hooked on Fishing, Not Drugs" program has really taken hold in northwest Montana. During the 1997/98 school year, more than 600 students from 29 classrooms participated in the year-round program. These students hailed from 20 different schools. For the 1998/99 school year, the program will grow to 40 classrooms from 26 different schools.

The "Hooked on Fishing" program emphasizes aquatic biology, fishing, fishing techniques, and application of these topics in math, science, writing and other areas. Most students in the program are fourth-graders, although classes from 3rd-9th grade are involved. The program offers students opportunities to learn about the environment in their own area, and to succeed at a positive, family activity.

Anyone interested in adopting the program in their area should contact the nearest office of FWP for more information.



DEER PARK SCHOOL STUDENTS show off some of the fish they caught at a Hooked on Fishing outing in May. At Deer Park school, 7th-graders mix with 3rd and 4th graders for a shared learning experience.



LOTS OF FISH! Teacher Jan Thon and fishing instructor John Cloninger help a Peterson School student in the Hooked on Fishing program. The two fourth grade classes at Peterson school caught over 100 panfish and a few trout on this outing in June.

Kids' Pages

Fish Poems

By "Hooked on Fishing" Students
in Teacher Donna Emerson's
3rd and 4th Grade Class at Bissell School

Fish
Slimy, fast
Fishing, casting, catching
Fishing at Echo Lake
Pumpkinseed
Kyle Burns - 4th grade

Northern Pike
Strong, awesome
Eating, fighting, swimming
They have big TEETH!
Water
Sam Sutch - 3rd grade

Sunfish
Bright, shiny
Swimming, jumping, squirming
Biting my shiny hook
Lepomis Cyanellus
Janna Rozar - 3rd grade

Water
Sky blue, smelly
Casting, reeling, pulling
Beautiful fish you catch
Creek
Karli Amundson - 4th grade

Crawdads
Weird, interesting
Quick, swimming, jumping
Enjoyable as a pet
Pinchers
Sammy Erickson - 3rd grade

Fish
Ugly, Black
Fishing, swimming, casting
I like to fish
Perch
Drew Schwegel - 4th grade

Line
Invisible, long
Casting, reeling, winding
Invisible piece of string
String
Jessica Bailey - 4th grade

Echo Lake
Merriment, beautiful
Exciting, baiting, hooking
Getting a lot of bites
Perch
Emily Jones - 3rd grade

KIDS— These pages are for you! Please send us your articles, tips, photos, etc., and become a published author!

All about Rock Rabbits (Pikas)

By Kevin Fraley

I first saw this little animal in the Jewel Basin. I was hiking to the Picnic Lakes with my family: Heather, Troy, my mom Dana, and my dad John. When we went a couple miles up the trail, we saw a rock slide. I was the first to hear the pikas. I found a food storage area of a pika under some rocks. We saw some pikas and then we started on our way again. Note: pikas eat grass/plants etc.

Rock Rabbits at Black Lake:

The second time, my dad and I went to Black Lake. I found a pika nibbling on some grass. I saw three others eating some of their storages.

Facts about Pikas: Some people call them coney. They live near rocks on mountain talus slopes. Pikas have

their own territory. They mate in late spring. They cure the dead plants and make hay. They make hay out of these plants: clover, columbine, grasses, saxifrage, huckleberry, bark, willow and lichens. Pikas don't hibernate. Marten and weasels eat them.

Other Facts:

- they like to take sunbaths
- they have round ears
- pika's hay is stored under rocks
- they call with their voices to say "This is my territory!"
- they eat their hay in winter



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- Learn about fishing and the water environment!



Ask a friend to join the M•A•Y Club, too!

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Montana•Angling•Youth Club
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Teachers' note:
Please copy and distribute this form to your students, then collect completed forms from interested students and return them to MFWP; or students may take the forms home and mail them in.
Thanks!

Registration Form

Name _____ Age _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Kevin Fraley, age 8, lives in Kalispell. His favorite hobbies are: bike riding, reading, hiking, fishing, bug catching, and trapping.



Miracle of America Museum Features Cougar Display

At Gil Mangels' Miracle of America Museum, located on Highway 93 just south of Polson, visitors receive up-to-date information on living with mountain lions.

Mangels leads school groups, other youth groups and the general public on tours through the museum. These tours include wildlife education.

"Suddenly spotting a 120-pound cougar, crouching on a cedar limb, makes some viewers jump even though it's behind glass," says Mangels.

"You'd be surprised at the answers when the tour guide asks what should be done if a cougar is seen in the wild. Answers of 'Shoot it!', 'Run!', and 'Play dead!' are fortunately in the minority."

Mangels says that those who know the correct behavior of staying calm, looking larger, standing not crouching, backing away slowly, and preparing to fight if necessary, are complemented. He distributes the brochure,

"Living with Montana Mountain Lions" to visitors who wish further information.

This pamphlet can also be picked up at any FWP office.



LIFELIKE WILDLIFE DISPLAYS are featured at Gil Mangels' Miracle of America Museum. The museum is located at 58176 Highway 93 in Polson. Photo is courtesy of Gil Mangels.



For more information on Fish, Wildlife & Parks issues, listen to:

"Northwest Outdoors,"

FWP's weekly radio show, Thursdays at 8:35 a.m.
on KGEZ, 600 AM.

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